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The “Black Swan” in England: Abolition and the Reception of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield

“The Black Swan, ladies and gentlemen, is not so black as she seems,” cried an actor to a Liverpool audience in attendance at a comic skit in 1853.¹ The “Black Swan” of this unnamed play was most likely intended to put the viewers in mind of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, a formerly enslaved African American vocalist who arrived via the port of Liverpool to sing for English audiences this same year. Greenfield had been performing under the “Black Swan” pseudonym in the northern United States for several years before her well-publicized English tour. This “one-act farce,” as it was called in London’s *Musical World*, enacted confusion over the perceived racial identity of the “Black Swan,” a confusion Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield similarly evoked over perceived “blackness” and “whiteness.” This study focuses on Greenfield’s English reception, especially connections among English and American abolitionists that created avenues of patronage for Greenfield and shaped reviewers comments. Harriet Beecher Stowe, in particular, and others involved in the trans-national anti-slavery cause enabled and influenced Greenfield’s acceptance as an “authentic” former slave with the potential for cultural “advancement.” Through my exploration of the cultural work Greenfield performed abroad, we get a better—or more complicated—understanding of perceived racial identity as a factor in the nineteenth-century exportation of American music and the later writing of that history. Greenfield’s English audiences eventually established what became precedents in words and attitudes and developed long-standing descriptive conventions for reviewing African American female voices.

The first known history of music to include a detailed description of Greenfield’s performance career came thirty years after her English sojourn in James Trotter’s influential *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (1881).² As Trotter presented mid-nineteenth-century abolitionists and English reviewers as authorities on Greenfield, a brief summary of Trotter’s

historical writing on Greenfield can serve as an introduction to the themes of my reception study. Trotter's opening discussion of "God's own music," the music of nature, resonates with the presumed natural musical ability of enslaved Africans, also allegedly possessed by Greenfield.³ The discussion of African American "highly musical people" to which the title refers occurs in chapters that follow a teleological narrative of western European music that highlights Beethoven and Mozart as "great masters" and conductor Theodore Thomas as a leader of American musical progress.⁴ Heavily involved in the politics of racial uplift and education, Trotter conflated the "cultivation of art music" with "progress of civilization," stating specifically that song could serve as a "medium of passage between primitive and civilized states."⁵ Within this context, Trotter insisted on Greenfield's self-taught status, presuming her musicality to be both natural and inherently spiritual, as well as her ability to be educated by Europeans and Euro-Americans.

Ultimately, Trotter's purpose was to praise her achievements that he understood to move beyond natural ability, carrying her race, as he defined it, toward a higher cultural level that he clearly identified with Western European elites. Trotter compared Greenfield favorably to her iconic contemporary Jenny Lind. Relying on documentation of Greenfield's English reception, Trotter cited the approval of Stowe, Queen Victoria, and other English cultural leaders as a special marker of achievement.⁶ Trotter's construction of Greenfield's identity through perceived naturalness in her voice and Anglo-Saxon markers of upper-class English culture and German "masters" comes directly from Greenfield's English reviews. Stowe and Greenfield's English reviewers provided interpretations of Greenfield that have been replicated for over a century in historical writing but have yet to be explored in the context of Anglo-American abolitionist movements. This study will use Anglo-American exchange to explore the English reception of Greenfield's music as politically and racially defined culture.

Drawing heavily from Trotter's work, more recent histories often hail Greenfield as America's first black "concert singer." For example, Eileen Southern's formidable work includes documentation of Greenfield's career and prestige. Southern's work undoubtedly served as inspiration for subsequent scholarly accounts of Greenfield and her African American female colleagues from later historical periods. Greenfield has received notice in some encyclopedias and compendia of American and African American music and honorable mention as an important precursor to subsequent generations of African American vocalists in scholarship devoted to women active after Greenfield.⁷ Now that there is a scholarly space opened for research and writing about nineteenth-century black female musicians, further research and theorizing about their historical reception and historiography is needed.

In identifying Greenfield as a "concert singer," nineteenth-century critics and twentieth-century scholars alike mean to offer her praise and distinction. This label is a historiographic short-cut pervasive in the second-

ary literature. However, not only does the distinction implied by in the label "concert singer" rely on a hierarchical construction of cultural value to which we may not subscribe, its usage may cause us to overlook crucial historical processes that gave rise to its construction. Like so many other nineteenth-century American musicians, Greenfield acquired status through a European performance and study tour. As Greenfield's achievements were measured by English reviewers within a mid-nineteenth-century framework of perceived racial characteristics and abolitionist reform projects, her reception was different from that of her Western European or white American contemporaries, even those who had attained similar "concert singer" status. The patronage and judgments Greenfield received in England emphasized her musical performance, physical appearance, and biography in order to identify racial traits in the context of their moral cause. In the domestic performing spaces and semi-public halls frequented by the English upper class, Greenfield faced sympathetic, qualified approval.

Greenfield's English audiences likely had detailed expectations for Greenfield before she arrived, since images of the "Black Swan" circulated in England even before 1853. The London musical press had reported on Greenfield's performances in Boston and New York, and images of the "Black Swan" were pervasive enough to become the subject and object of a popular parody from which I quoted at the beginning of this essay.⁸ Most importantly, a long history of transatlantic abolitionist cooperation and American cultural exportation arranged audiences for Greenfield, established interest in her English tour, and created potent expectations for Greenfield's performances.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society cultivated connections between anti-slavery movements in the United States and England that had been established by Quakers during the previous century.⁹ After England banned slavery in the 1830s, reformers in the British Isles focused their attention on slavery still practiced in the southern United States. During the 1840s and 1850s, upper-class patrons predominated, and British and Irish women contributed most of the foreign aid sent to the American anti-slavery movement.¹⁰ Contributions and activities of London-based societies of female elites overshadowed the Glasgow Female New Association for the Abolition of Slavery which had extended Stowe her first invitation to the British Isles as well as the "Penny Offering" collected from middle-class readers of her novel in April of 1853.¹¹ Once in England, Stowe's address to "Anglican ladies" at Stafford House, the Duchess of Sutherland's London home and meeting place for a fashionable literary set, reflected this general shift from middle class to aristocratic leadership of the movement.¹² By 1850, the female chapters, or "ladies auxiliaries," outnumbered the male groups, and women increasingly took leadership positions in the movement.¹³ By the time Greenfield arrived in England, reviewers fit her neatly into the racial and moral discourse already in progress amongst abolitionists.



Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (1809–1876), known as the “Black Swan.” (Courtesy of American Music Research Center)



Matilda Sissieretta Joyner Jones (1869–1933), called the "Black Patti," enjoyed a highly celebrated and successful concert career in the generation following the "Black Swan."

This predominately female audience organized through social, literary, and moral reform circles, first received *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then Stowe herself, and finally Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield in the following year. Citing it as the most important nineteenth-century American novel because of the cultural work it accomplished and as the first American novel to sell over a million copies, Jane Tompkins insists that the novel had been overlooked by scholars for decades specifically because of its sentimentality rendered for a female audience.¹⁴ Tompkins and other literary scholars who comment on the reception of Stowe in England seem at pains to emphasize the overwhelming popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its resonance with Victorian "sentimentalism."¹⁵ During the first year of publication, more than twice as many copies of the novel sold in England as in the United States; in fact, eighteen publishing houses in London produced forty different editions.¹⁶ Already in December of 1852, English theaters had staged eleven different versions.¹⁷ Widespread commercial consumption of "Uncle Tom" paraphernalia that was clearly attached to anti-slavery politics in the United States and England included coffee, china, notepaper, and even sheet music with titles from the novel.¹⁸ That Stowe's characters could be used to market household goods demonstrates widespread familiarity and the appeal of her depictions of slaves, as well as the degree to which her characters were assimilated into English culture. Stowe's novel and related marketing campaigns presented interrelated cultural signifiers to a reform-minded female audience.

Audrey Fisch proposes several explanations for the popularity of Stowe's novel and by extension, the "Uncle Tom" figure, including sympathy for the abolitionist cause and belief in the potential of the novel as a valuable anti-slavery tool, desire to sully the image of American freedom with Stowe's brutal depictions of slavery, and genuine curiosity about what they perceived to be realistic depictions of slavery and the enslaved.¹⁹ Stowe portrayed Uncle Tom, for example, as a dependable, honest, moral, and naturally religious man who sings about bright angels and the land of Canaan.²⁰ One contemporary British reviewer commented that prior to the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, English people would have received most ideas about blacks from minstrel shows and would have thought blacks to be exclusively comic figures.²¹ Minstrelsy had long perpetuated images of contented slaves and was by no means erased from the English horizon when Greenfield arrived. By the 1850s, however, minstrelsy had also incorporated the theme of slave suffering.²² Stowe's characters offered additional "serious" and "authentic" images of blacks to rival the comic characters.

The *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* that circulated after the novel helped to further solidify the belief in Stowe's realistic portrayal of slavery and American blacks. This key presented the source materials behind *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, undermining its reception as fiction and proposing it as truthful testimonial. In Stowe's words, the key "made up of the facts, the documents, the things which my own eyes have looked upon and my hands

have handled, that attest this awful indictment upon my country."²³ Stowe's novel and key presented black characters who were not exclusively comic, establishing interest in "real" black Americans like Greenfield. Belief that Stowe depicted real-life slaves and the brutal realities they lived created expectations for African American musicians who toured in England during this period, as does Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield. As Katie Graber's essay in this issue demonstrates, Stowe's characters and Greenfield's tour are important to understanding the reception of the Fisk Singers several decades later. The Fisk Singers, like the characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, were viewed as naturally spiritual and likewise in need of assistance from the more privileged classes and races who serve as Stowe's and Greenfield's audience.

Besides Stowe and the novel's characters, English audiences had been introduced to other American cultural ambassadors working for abolition who, like her, may have created expectations for Greenfield's appearance. Audrey Fisch has noted the mid-nineteenth century English public's "delight in runaway American negros."²⁴ Touring in the period after the widespread popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, English audiences received Frederick Douglass and other American blacks as both partners in the campaign against slavery and unequal exotic foreigners. American blacks in England could not escape comparison with Stowe's well-known characters; Douglass, in particular, had been received as a "real-life Uncle Tom."²⁵

Musicians need to be added to this story of abolitionist cultural exchange. Greenfield and others contributed much to the English perceptions of slaves as naturally musical and, in some cases, of American music as racialized. The Hutchinson Singers toured in the decade before Greenfield, establishing precedents for pursuing anti-slavery reform through song. The popular appeal of the Hutchinson Family Singers had been in part their "natural" and "uncultivated" tone and informal presentation, characteristics that are racialized when later applied to Greenfield in the 1850s.²⁶ Henry "Box" Brown, who escaped slavery by being shipped in a box to free Northern states, sang "native melodies" in England two years before Greenfield. By singing, speaking on slavery, and exhibiting paintings of America, Brown satisfied an interest in foreign American slave bodies and voices and whetted the appetite for subsequent performances.²⁷ Brown was received, as Douglass had been, as an exotic and authentic former slave, but unlike Douglass, Brown used music as part of his performance of race.

Onto the horizon, dotted by American/English cultural exchange and changed by abolitionist work in England, sailed Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield in 1853. After landing in Liverpool, as did Stowe a few months previously, Greenfield met Stowe, and Greenfield sang for members of the national anti-slavery society.²⁸ Stowe's presentation of Greenfield to aid her abolitionist work in England is frequently overlooked by Stowe's biographers.²⁹ Greenfield contributed much to Stowe's moral campaigns, however, serving as the focal point of many meetings and building on a Victorian belief in the power of song to communicate moral virtue.³⁰ Stowe was, needless to say, a prominent enabler of Greenfield's English tour.

The following excerpt from an English review of Stowe's novel also speaks to the reception Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield faced in England:

This picture of life in the Slave States of America undoubtedly owes some of its interest to the novelty of its subject. Manners, domestic economy, sketches of scenery, and "interiors," which if drawn in England would attract little attention although equally well done, have the charm of freshness when displaying a state of society which is sufficiently removed from our own to be new yet not so remote as to be strange.³¹

For English audiences, Greenfield similarly represented the American slave culture depicted in Stowe's novel, described by this reviewer as "sufficiently removed from our own to be new." On the other hand, Stowe's novel was "not so remote as to be strange," and likewise, the English elite who received Greenfield were charmed by her perceived musical humanity. Stowe fostered a reception of Greenfield as an American freed slave with Anglo-European markers of musical achievement. For her English patrons Greenfield was both exotic and authentic, but not too grotesque for invitation into their domestic performance spaces. Greenfield, in comparison to preceding tours of formerly enslaved African Americans, seemed more "refined" to Victorians, marking her, in their view, as further along the path of education and advancement, causes to which audience members felt sympathetic.

Before Greenfield left the United States, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, an American abolitionist newspaper, predicted that she would "be received as one of Uncle Tom's daughters."³² By the time Greenfield arrived in England, Stowe, in the wake of her novel's great success, had established herself in English high society and was in an excellent social and political position to introduce Greenfield. Once in England, reviewers continued to observe connections between Stowe and Greenfield, often articulating Stowe as presenter of the "Black Swan."³³ In England, Greenfield apparently assumed the role of "authentic" former slave, or one of Stowe's characters come to life. A sheet music advertisement for *The Slave's Escape*, dedicated to the Duchess of Sutherland, claimed that the dramatic vocal roles enacting a female slave's attempted escape and recapture had been sung by the "Black Swan." The horrifying images of a slave being chased and captured by the master's dogs in this song would have resonated with the brutal realism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We cannot be certain Greenfield performed this particular work as is advertised, but in this advertisement and presumably in performance, Greenfield played the role of a singing slave. The song's dedication to the Duchess of Sutherland, a known abolitionist and patroness to Greenfield, together with the "authentic" slave imagery in the narrative, exploits her then-current image as a well-known singer with connections to British abolitionists. This advertisement and Greenfield's lasting reception relies on her identity as a former

slave and her story-telling voice as genuine, insightful, and potentially autobiographical. Greenfield's legacy was constructed from the "Black Swan" verbal and visual depictions as well as her own musical performances.

Ronald Radano's analysis of historical writings on slave song in *Lying Up a Nation* are pertinent to this study, since he draws several comparisons between white American writers' descriptions of slave song and Greenfield's performances. Radano notes that white writers in the nineteenth century privileged slave voices and gave them musically exceptional status, and that by the 1850s, writers extolled the expressive virtues of black singers and the vocal virtuosity of slaves. The trope of the naturally musical, cheerful, singing slave is a convention of slave song descriptions by white Americans and foreign travelers to America.³⁴ When American and English writers reviewed Greenfield's performances, they perpetuated these tropes from a previously written body of slave song descriptions and documentation of musicality among enslaved persons.

English audiences went to Greenfield's performances looking and listening for what they expected based on Greenfield's former slave identity—an untrained musicality that accentuated the bodily aspects of the voice as the natural human instrument. Reviews of Greenfield's performance characterize her voice as "wholly natural," and as "lacking the training and exquisite cultivation that belongs to the skillful Italian singer."³⁵ Reviewers deny her agency and past educational experiences by commenting on her performance style marked by "wonderful ease, and apparently an entire want of exertion."³⁶ She received little credit for any recognized technical achievements because reviewers were invested in hearing her voice as authentic, pure, and untrained. Writers conflated naturalness and musicality as part of her former slave identity. Stowe wrote of Greenfield not as exceptional, necessarily, but "like others of her race," who had "a passion for music, and could sing and play by ear."³⁷ Despite her instrumental skills, it was her voice that remained the focus for Stowe and English reviewers alike.

Certain conventions developed in reviewing Greenfield's performance. Foremost among these tropes was to rave about her extraordinary vocal range; she was variously described as bass, baritone, tenor, contralto, alto, and soprano.³⁸ Another pattern in reviews, as in Trotter's written history based on reviews, was to compare the "Black Swan" with the "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind. Greenfield apparently sang two notes higher than Jenny Lind and also lower. Lind and Greenfield probably shared a similar performance repertoire, but English reviewers usually failed to name the works which she sang.³⁹ Stowe's memoirs mention Greenfield's singing *Old Folks at Home* at Stafford House, and a review of an Exeter Hall performance notes her number. *Home Sweet Home*.⁴⁰

Shared repertoire made possible a comparison between Greenfield and Lind, but reviewers more often used vocal quality and artistry as points of contrast. Stowe described Greenfield's voice as inappropriately mascu-

line: "She sings a most magnificent tenor, with such a breath and volume of sound that, with our backs turned you could not imagine it to be a woman."⁴¹ Marking her clearly as an abnormal female, this language stands in stark contrast to Jenny Lind's idealized femininity and whiteness. Sometimes reviews refer to Greenfield's vocal power, always constructed as a physical quality, such as strength of the "vocal organs."⁴² Reviewers take interest in other aspects of her body: her dress, her facial features, her height and weight, and the mannerisms with which she conducted herself on stage. Reviewing female, especially black female, vocalists' bodies unfortunately remained a convention for some time.⁴³ Greenfield's English reviewers foreshadow the later reception of female African American vocalists, as other commentators follow what becomes a convention—conflation of ambiguous gender images and markers of the radicalized other. The tacit assumptions related to reviews of black female singers need special emphasis. It cannot be stated too strongly that Trotter and more recent historians who use Trotter as an authority on Greenfield when comparing her with Lind habitually neglect to contrast the *receptions* of the two women in their respective concerts.

Nor did Martin Robinson Delany's 1852 account of Greenfield's early career in *The Condition, Elevation, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* contrast the receptions of these two "concert singers." According to Delany, the occasion of Greenfield's own realization of the "high character of her own talent" was her attendance at concerts given by Jenny Lind in New York before Greenfield left for England.⁴⁴ Delany insisted that the comparison to the iconic white *prima donna* was somehow a necessary step in Greenfield's self-recognition. Delany wrote of Greenfield:

Being raised in obscurity, inured to callings far beneath her propensity, and unsuited to her taste, she had a desire to cultivate her talents, but no one to encourage her. Whenever she made the effort, she was discouraged—perhaps ridiculed; and thus discouraged, she would shrink again from her anxious task never meeting with a person who could fully appreciate her talents.⁴⁵

Delany championed Greenfield's achievements by telling a story of uplift from a pitiful past. Greenfield's English audience, motivated by the desire to take part in her "uplift," similarly emphasized her former slave identity while simultaneously embracing the notion of her progress toward "civilized" high culture.

Stowe wrote of Greenfield's physical appearance in a description of a gathering at Stafford House, noting what elements of grace (mostly characteristics of dress, not behavior) she had achieved but simultaneously marking her as a distinctive outsider among the gathered Anglican nobles. Stowe wrote: "She is not handsome, but looked very well. She has a pleasing dark face, wore a black velvet headdress and white carnelian earrings, a black moiré antique silk, made high in the neck, with white lace falling sleeves and

white gloves. A certain gentleness of manner and self-possession⁴⁶ Elsewhere, Stowe wrote in a self-proclaimed defense of "Negro women's" beauty from which we can derive her conception of racialized feminine normality:

If they could see my good old Aunt Frankie coming with her honest, bluff, black face, her long strong arms, her chest as big and stout as a barrel and her hilarious hearty laugh, perfectly delighted to take ones [sic] washing and do it for a fair price, they would appreciate the beauty of black people.⁴⁷

Stowe's conception of "black beauty" emphasizes physical strength, and is based on a cheerful willingness and ability to serve an upper class. Stowe's definition of black beauty is obviously not the idealized white female beauty epitomized by Jenny Lind.

Compare Stowe's words about Greenfield and "Aunt Frankie" to Stowe's written account of a performance by Jenny Lind in New York, the previous year: "Well, we have heard Jenny Lind, and the affair was a bewildering dream of sweetness and beauty. Her face and movements are full of poetry and feeling. She has the artless grace of a little child, the poetic effect of a wood-nymph, is airy, light and graceful."⁴⁸ Whereas Stowe saw "a certain gentleness" in Greenfield, Lind is consumed by innocent grace. Stowe depicted black women as mature, large, and strong and Lind as child-like, light, and airy. Whereas black beauty has a comic component in Stowe's construction, Lind's every move is serious and poetic. They were comparable as singing birds only to a certain extent; the nightingale's delicate melody was distinct from the powerful trumpeting or honking of a swan. By differentiating between these two "concert singers," Stowe helps to strengthen the categories of race defined by her abolitionist culture.

Stowe and English writers similarly explained the untrained, undisciplined aspect of Greenfield's voice as a casualty of her unfortunate background, evoking sympathy from an audience engaged in the moral cause of freeing and educating slaves according to reformers' cultural values. Historian Christine Bolt has written about participants in the abolition movement of this era as having a somewhat blind dedication to abstract principles, and assuming an attitude in which slaves were idealized and dehumanized as they fought for the larger cause of justice and morality.⁴⁹ Reviewers compared Greenfield to Lind as a way of offering praise. But all kudos was qualified; true artistry and cultivation were reserved for Lind. Reviewers considered the "Black Swan" a musical "curiosity, but not an artist."⁵⁰ One unusually scathing reviewer of her Exeter Hall performance points to "incorrect intonation, crude style, lack of flexibility, and want of taste" as evidence that "she has everything to learn, besides unlearning what she has now acquired."⁵¹ Even when the review is favorable overall, the absence of cultivation is raised: "She has some notes in her voice that are musical and which might possibly be improved by cultivation, but at present there is not the faintest approach to the latter qualification. The

attraction we imagine was the novelty of the exhibition rather than the talent which might be exhibited.”⁵² The *London Times* reported that she “doesn’t greatly shine in vocal art” after praising her extraordinary range and vocal capabilities.⁵³ The collective assessment of Greenfield pointed to her amazingly novel appeal, but a lack of artistry was always the qualifier, and continued to be the qualifier for black female vocalists who followed her.

Elise Lemire’s recent work on “miscegenation,” a nineteenth-century euphemism for what is now called “inter-racial relationships,” is insightful. In Lemire’s view, the discourse of miscegenation brought the categories “black” and “white” into definition during the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁴ It was important, even among nineteenth-century abolitionists, to make distinctions between “black” and “white” in order to make impossible an “inter-racial” attraction. In drawing vivid distinctions between the traits of beauty recognized in Greenfield and African-American servants on one hand, and Jenny Lind on the other hand, Stowe prevented critics of abolition, who may have feared “miscegenation,” from assuming a sexual attraction between abolitionists and formerly enslaved Africans. Even when commenting favorably on her musical achievements, Greenfield’s patrons and reviewers used racialized language that helped define her as different. Within abolitionist culture, “black” and “white” categories were defined through musical reception.

Stowe was aware that most anti-slavery support came from the wealthy women in the upper echelons of British society and presented Greenfield in this context to further social and moral goals Stowe herself identified. Anglo reformers pursued patronizing avenues without departing from societal expectations for upper-class female pursuits, and Victorians were invested in the notion that music could serve as a vehicle for furthering moral causes. Speaking directly to the cultural work accomplished by the Stafford House performance, Lord Shaftesbury told Stowe, “I consider the use of these halls for the encouragement of an outcast race a consecration. This is the true use of wealth and splendor, when it is employed to raise up and encourage the despised and forgotten.”⁵⁵ Shaftesbury demonstrated to Stowe what she was anxious to see, according to one of her biographers, that “privilege and benefice go hand in hand.”⁵⁶ For Stowe, what Greenfield sang or how she sang was not as important in assessing the success of the performance as who was in attendance and with what titles they were identified. Thus Stowe wrote in her journal after Greenfield’s performance on May 30: “Hons. and right Hons. were all there; I sat by Lord Carlisle.”⁵⁷ In short, those present were the “choicest of the elite,” and this demonstrated Stowe’s as well as Greenfield’s success.⁵⁸ Stowe and English Abolitionists ensured that Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield circulated among the highest social tier while in England, and she viewed Greenfield’s presence among them as a marker of success for herself, Greenfield, and the racial “uplift” cause.

Those active in the abolitionist movement expressed sympathy for

Greenfield to establish their own high social and moral standing. Thomas Riis deconstructs her pseudonym "Black Swan," noting the grace and pride associated with white swans. The swan metaphor works, in that it has the ability to "evoke both aesthetic as well as emotional sympathy."⁵⁹ Greenfield's patrons comment sympathetically on what they perceive as musical achievements as well as her "unfortunate background." Stowe's recollection of the introduction of Greenfield to the Duchess of Sutherland (which led to the previously discussed Stafford House performance) demonstrates Stowe's view of the Duchess's profound sympathy evoked by her singing and a legacy of slavery:

Today the Duchess of Sutherland called with the Duchess of Argyll. Miss Greenfield happened to be present; and I begged leave to present her, giving a slight sketch of her history. I was pleased with the kind and easy affability with which the Duchess of Sutherland conversed with her, betraying by no inflection of voice, and nothing in her air or manner, the great lady talking with the poor girl. She seemed much pleased with her singing, and remarked that she should be happy to give her an opportunity of performing in Stafford house.⁶⁰

Stowe viewed it appropriate and necessary to give a "sketch of her history," as Greenfield's identity as a former slave was important to evoking sympathy, as I have already established. Stowe then interpreted the treatment of Greenfield in this social situation to be a marker of the Duchess's high social status and moral grace. The Duchess of Sutherland was active in the anti-slavery movement, but also patroness of the Ladies Negro Education Society and "Mistress of the Robes" to Queen Victoria. Stowe clearly aligned herself with the Duchess by rejoicing in their joint patronage of the "poor girl." At the Stafford house performance, even before she opened her mouth to sing, Stowe insisted that just the sight of Greenfield "excited a sympathetic murmur among the audience," whose "certain gentleness of manner and self-possession, the result of the universal kindness shown her, sat well upon her."⁶¹ In this construction of Greenfield's identity, her high-class behavior is the direct result of English patronage and reform activism cited as "universal kindness." Cultural historian Clare Midgley has explained the embrace of the "Uncle Tom" figure in terms of the anti-slavery reform role it left Anglo-abolitionists. I would explain Greenfield's attractiveness similarly through her audience's devotion to educational projects, as she left her patrons a role in what they perceived as her cultural advancement.⁶²

When Stowe or the English elites with whom she associated commented favorably on Greenfield's performance, not surprisingly, they commented on aspects of their conception of high culture to credit themselves with moral success as patrons. Social and political connections not only led to Greenfield's performances at Stafford house, but also for Queen Victoria.

and musical study with Sir George Smart, organist and music director to the queen.⁶³ Even for privileged white musicians, finishing an American training with European instruction was a pattern well-established by the middle of the nineteenth century and was a pattern that remained a prerequisite for “cultivated” musician status in America for many decades. In England, George Smart was probably the best known instructor at the time Greenfield took lessons from him.⁶⁴ Study with Smart, thus, enabled Greenfield’s cultural advancement according to mid-nineteenth century Anglo-American cultural standards.⁶⁵ Musical instruction in England earned Greenfield the Euro-prestige unavailable to her in the United States.

The piano was another icon of “cultivation” and “advancement” associated with Greenfield (and with women in general during the nineteenth century). In Stowe’s description of the Stafford House performance, the centrality of the piano and unnatural cultivated flowers in the elegant setting is striking: “The piano was on the flat stairway just below the broad central landing. It was a grand piano, standing end outward, and perfectly banked up among hothouse flowers, so that only its gilded top was visible.”⁶⁶ The piano is important here as a domestic instrument in this semi-private musical performance and an instrument played by women. Greenfield’s ability to accompany herself on guitar, harp, and piano, was known through reviewers’ commentary and was read as a European-American marker of feminine cultivation, even though Smart accompanied her at the Stafford House event.⁶⁷ Conceptually fitting into public and private performance spheres, her singing and accompanying skill would nonetheless relate her to her female patrons who likely had similar domestic music accomplishments.⁶⁸ Stowe calls attention to details of the performance scene that relate her to her patrons while keeping her separate. For her English audiences, Greenfield was “sufficiently removed from our own to be new,” but “not so remote as to be strange.”⁶⁹

The one-act musical farce playing in Liverpool before Greenfield’s arrival in England and from which I quoted at the beginning of this essay is laid at a Liverpool Hotel where the comic “Black Swan” character appears with her father to give a concert. The observant chamber maid recognizes the character as a “white English lady” in disguise, not the famed black vocalist from America. The father bribes the maid to keep her quiet. But after his daughter, continuing her charade, sings, “Why Did My Master Sell Me?”⁷⁰ to her own accompaniment, the chamber maid, unable to contain herself any longer, screams, “the Black Swan, ladies and gentlemen, is not so black as she seems,” thereby tearing off the mask in a broadly comic turn. The scene thus urges the audience to view the white woman playing black in a high-class setting as absurd.⁷¹

As the play vividly illustrates, “race” in mid-nineteenth-century England (and elsewhere) was highly subjective; the term’s vague meaning led to confusion between, and often conflation of, the supposed biological and cultural determinants of a common category.⁷² We could just as easily see this unease about culturally-defined racial markers as enacting fear over

the possibility of transferring between categories of slave and freed slave who acquires certain markers of Anglo-elite culture. Lemire's work on "miscegenation" leads me to believe that this dramatization of racial confusion might have been intended to voice reservations or concern over Stowe's visit or abolitionism.⁷³ Is the Liverpool farce perhaps exploiting the Black Swan image, known to be embraced by anti-slavery activists, in order to make fun of abolitionists, or Stowe in particular?

Swan-like in her graceful socialization among a privileged elite, but black in her perceived race and legacy of slavery, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield was the ideal figure to symbolize racial confusion in the Liverpool Farce and to be embraced by English critics and cultural leaders. Reviewers sympathetic to an anti-slavery cause seem to leave open the possibility of cultural "advancement." Yet, Greenfield was an exotic and foreign curiosity, to say the least, and language in the reviews draws together her racial identity and musicality under common nineteenth-century beliefs that these qualities are related. The discourse of "authentic" musical slave and cultural "uplift" served to define racial traits that strengthened notions of "black" and "white" as distinct racial categories. Greenfield's English reception was largely shaped by an anti-slavery reform movement dedicated to what they believed to be cultural advancement for freed slaves—advancement constructed through a hierarchy with Anglo-Saxon high culture as supreme.

Greenfield helped set the stage for a reception of late nineteenth-century African American vocalists such as the Fisk Singers, who are the subject of Katie Graber's essay here, and also Marie Selika, Flora Batson, Anna Madah and Emma Louise Hyers, and Matilda Sissieretta Jones, all active in the decades after Greenfield.⁷⁴ For example, reviews of Sissieretta Jones's performances in the 1890s, within a framework established with Greenfield's career, construct her voice as natural and untrained, with much of her appeal being her pure and strong voice.⁷⁵ Reviewers argued that a comparison between Jones and Greenfield was more appropriate than Jones and her contemporary white colleagues, even implying that Jones ought to model her performance style and image on Greenfield's rather than white contemporaries like Adelina Patti. For some, Jones's nickname, the "Black Patti," signaled that she had gone too far in blurring white and black female vocal performance practice; the "Black Swan" had been more "authentically" different because she did not adopt all the markers of Jenny Lind's image or vocal performance.⁷⁶

Greenfield's reviewers consistently drew distinctions between Greenfield and Lind based on vocal quality, perceived artistry, and physical appearance. Greenfield was the first among the aforementioned African-American female vocalists to gain notoriety and to attain a certain degree of social standing among the British elite through performances of European music in the United States and abroad, and she was also the closest to a legacy of slavery in the United States, a legacy that long after abolition affected musical reception. Reminiscent of the radicalized language

used in descriptions of slave song, reviewers and historians continually employ tropes of an untrained, natural, and strong voice to separate African American female vocalists from their western and northern European contemporaries. Later historians who label Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield “America’s first black concert singer,” often use her “favorable” English reception to establish her success. As this essay has attempted to demonstrate, the language of reviewers and patrons is complicated and cannot easily be reduced to a favorable or unfavorable judgment of Greenfield’s performance of music and race. In my exploration, I hope to have fulfilled my promise to complicate our understanding of race as a factor in the exportation of nineteenth-century African American music.

Notes

1. *Musical World*, 14 May 1853, 306.
2. James Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1881, Reprint, Johnson Reprint corporation: 1968).
3. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 12–13.
4. *Ibid.*, 49–50.
5. *Ibid.*, 50–51.
6. *Ibid.*, 67.
7. Most notable is Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1983), 103, 370. William W. Austin, “Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield,” in *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, ed. Hitchcock and Sadie (New York: Macmillan Press, 1984). Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 427–428. Darryl Glenn Nettles, *African American Concert Singers Before 1950* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2003), 69. “Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield” in *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, Centennial edition, ed. Nicolas Slonimsky (New York: Schirmer, 2001). Eileen Southern, “In Retrospect: Black Prima Donnas of the Nineteenth-Century,” *Black Perspective in Music* 7, no. 1 (1970): 95–106 and *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1982), 153. Rosalyn M. Story, *And So I Sing* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 37–58. Carolyne Lamar Jordan, “Black Female Concert Singers of the Nineteenth-Century: Nellie Brown Mitchell and Marie Selika Williams,” in *Feel the Spirit: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century African American Music*, ed. George R. Keck and Sherrill V. Martin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 35–48. John Graziano has documented biographical information of the performance career of a late nineteenth-century African American female, Matilda Sissieretta Jones, “The Black Patti,” bringing her into mainstream musicology, “The Early Life and Career of the Black Patti: The Odyssey of an African American Singer in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 3 (2000), 543–596.
8. *Musical World*, 28 February 1852, 133. *Musical World*, 14 May 1853, 306.
9. Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780–1870* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 121–127.
10. Christine Bolt. *The Anti-Slavery Movement and Reconstruction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 11.
11. The “penny offering” was presented to Stowe in Edinburgh, 20 April 1853. Charles Edward Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), 189. Florine Thayer McCray, *The Life Work of the Author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889), 157.
12. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 148.
13. *Ibid.*, 121–127.
14. Jane Tompkins, “Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History” in *Sensational Designs. The Cultural Works of American Fiction 1790–*

1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 124–125; Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 146.

15. Audrey A. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

16. Thomas F. Gossett, "The Reception Abroad of Uncle Tom's Cabin," in *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 239. Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 190.

17. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England*, 13. Thomas Riis has documented the musical importance of many of these dramatic productions that remained popular for over half of a century, "The Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Productions of Uncle Tom's Cabin," *American Music* 14, no. 3 (1986): 268–286.

18. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England*, 14. Sheet music titles from England, as listed in Fisch include "The Little Evangelist," "Poor Uncle Tom," "The Slave Wife," "Eva," "The Fugitive Slave," "Emeline," and "A Tear for Uncle Tom." The Americana Sheet Music Collection at the University of Wisconsin-Madison includes "Eva to her Papa" by G. C. Howard (1853) and "Uncle Tom's Gwine to Stay" by C. A. White and G. R. Jackson (1881).

19. Gossett, "The Reception Abroad of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," 242.

20. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (reprinted by New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 192.

21. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Perspective Review* 8 (1852): 494, printed in Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, 243–245. This is a topic addressed by Thomas Riis in "The Cultivated White Tradition and Black Music in Nineteenth-Century America: A Discussion of Some Articles in J. S. Dwight's Journal of Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 2 (July 1976): 156–176.

22. Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 146.

23. Harriet Beecher Stowe quoted in Charles Edward Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 188. In a letter to the Earl of Shaftesbury concerning this key that was circulating in England before her trip, she wrote, "It contains in an undeniable form, the facts which corroborate all that I have said," 173.

24. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England*, 69.

25. *Ibid.*, 70–72.

26. Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: MacMillan, 2001). s.v. "Hutchinson," by Dale Cockrell. Dale Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior: Journals of the Hutchinson Family Singers, 1842-1846* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1989).

27. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England*, 73–74.

28. Arthur R. LaBrew, *The Black Swan, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield Songstress* (Detroit: La Brew, 1969), 18.

29. One exception is perhaps Florine Thayer McCray, *The Life Work of the Author of Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889), 202. McCray mentions Greenfield, but does not discuss the implications of their work together. Joan D. Hedrick hints at Stowe's work with Greenfield by mentioning Stowe as patroness of the arts and "the race," *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 249.

30. Paula Gillett discusses Anglican moral activism intersecting with female musicality in her work on musical women in England. Although her study is of a slightly later period in the nineteenth-century, she notes in passing that music in the abolition movement established a tradition for the slum philanthropy she writes about after 1870. Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 36–37.

31. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Spectator*, 25 September 1852, 926–928, printed in Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 242.

32. *Anti-Slavery Standard* quoted in La Brew, *The Black Swan, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield Songstress*, 81.

33. "Hanover-Square Rooms" (London) *Times* (1 June 1853): 8.

34. Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music*, 147, 143, 140.

35. A review of one of Greenfield's American performances, reprinted in London's

Musical World, introduced a conventional comparison of Lind and Greenfield to English readers. "Foreign" *Musical World*, 28 February 1852, 188. "The Black Swan" *Musical World*, 14 May 1853, 311.

36. "The Black Swan" *Musical World*, 14 May 1853, 311.

37. Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Dwight's Journal* 5 no. 17 (1854): 134.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Utica Daily Observer* (13 January 1852) quoted in LaBrew, *The Black Swan, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield Songstress*, 37. *Cincinnati Enquirer* (14 March 1852) quoted in LaBrew, 59. Harriet Beecher Stowe quoted in *Dwight's Journal* 5, no. 17 (29 July 1854): 134. "Hanover-Square Rooms" (London) *Times* (1 June 1853): 8. *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* (10 October 1851) in LaBrew, 25. Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (London: Simpson Low, Son, and Company, 1854), 100 and *Dwight's Journal* 5, no. 17, 29 July 1854, 134.

40. Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, 101. "Exeter Hall" *New York Musical World and Times*, 16 July 1853, 172.

41. Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Dwight's Journal* 5, no. 17 (1854): 134.

42. "The Black Swan" *Musical World*, 14 May 1853, 311.

43. Attention to physical description and mannerisms is documented in Jones's reception. Graziano, "The Early Life and Career of the 'Black Patti,'" 573. Conversations I have had with Jessica Courtier about her dissertation work on early twentieth-century short musical films reminds me that the convention of reviewing black female vocalists in terms of physical appearance measured according to an assumed objective ideal of white beauty continues well into the twentieth century. Francis Davis's book not only quotes reviewers on female blues singers without calling them into question, but he participates in denigrating the appearance of Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues: The Roots, The Music, The People* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 64, 74, 77.

44. Martin Robinson Delany *The Condition, Elevation, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968), 121.

45. Delany, *The Condition of Colored People*, 120.

46. Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, 100.

47. Harriet Beecher Stowe quoted in Charles Edward Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 200.

48. *Ibid.*, 182.

49. Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, 30.

50. "Foreign," *Musical World*, 28 February 1852, 133.

51. "Exeter Hall" (NY) *Musical World and Times*, 6 July 1853, 172.

52. *NY Times* 1 April 1853, 1.

53. "Hanover-Square Rooms" (London) *Times*, 1 June 1853, 8.

54. Elise Lemire, "*Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). Lemire also devotes an entire chapter to Harriet Beecher Stowe and song.

55. Shaftesbury quoted in Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, 102.

56. Shirley Foster, *American Women Travelers to Europe in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Staffordshire, England: Keele University Press, 1994), 20.

57. Harriet Beecher Stowe quoted in Charles Edward Stowe, *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 238.

58. Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (London: Simpson Low, Son, and Company, 1854), 100.

59. Thomas Riis, "Concert Singers, Prima Donnas, and Entertainers: The Changing Status of Black Women Vocalists in Nineteenth-Century America" in *Music and Culture in America, 1861-1918*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Garland, 1998), 54.

60. Harriet Beecher Stowe quoted in James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 81.

61. Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, 100.

62. Midgley. *Women Against Slavery*, 148.

63. LaBrew, *The Black Swan, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield Songstress*, 18.

64. Among the well-known singers to whom he gave lessons was Jenny Lind. Stanley

Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: MacMillan, 2001). S.v. "Smart, George," by W.H. Husk and Nicholas Temperley.

65. Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, 100. Joseph S. Vanwhy and Earl French, eds. *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Europe: The Journal of Charles Beecher* (Hartford: The Stowe-Day Foundation, 1986), 120.

66. Stowe, *Sunny Memories*, 100.

67. LaBrew, *The Black Swan, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield Songstress*, 28, 54.

68. Mary Burgan, "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," in *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music* ed. Nicholas Temperley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 42–47. Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), especially 267–300. Richard Leppert, "Music, Domestic Life, and Cultural Chauvinism: Images of British Subjects at Home in India," in *Music and Society*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 63–104.

69. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Spectator* (25 September 1852): 926–928, printed in Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, 242.

70. I have been unable to locate any documentation of this song title elsewhere.

71. "Strand," *Musical World* (14 May 1853): 306.

72. Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, ix, 206.

73. Lemire, "Miscegenation": *Making Race in America*, 4.

74. Graziano, "The Early Life and Career of the 'Black Patti,'" 10. Story, "And So I Sing," 20–28.

75. Graziano quotes this review but does not draw our attention to this usage of language or that it is connected to a convention of reviewing African American female singers. Graziano, "The Early Life and Career of the 'Black Patti,'" 574.

76. Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff analyze Jones's reviews. Most important for my discussion, they quote from the *New York Age* (8 February 1890) and *Cleveland Gazette* (22 October 1892). Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889–1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 36, 217.